SHAKESPEARE
MADE EASY
The Merchant of Venice

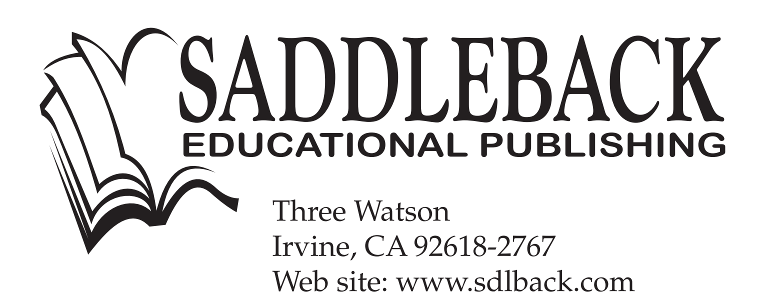


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SHAKESPEARE
MADE EASY
The Merchant of Venice



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To the Teacher

As any teacher or student who has read Shakespeare knows, his plays are not easy. They are thought-provoking and complex texts that abound with romance, deceit, tragedy, comedy, revenge, and humanity shown at its very worst as well as its very best. In short, to read Shakespeare is to explore the depths and heights of humanity.

The *Shakespeare Made Easy* Activity Guides are designed by teachers for teachers to help students navigate this journey. Each guide is broken into six sections of four activities and one review. At the end of each guide is a final test, a variety of culminating activities, and an answer key. The activities are meant to aid textual comprehension, to provide creative opportunities for the reader to make personal connections with the text, and to help busy teachers gain quick access to classroom-tested and age-appropriate activities that make the teaching of Shakespeare an easier task.

Each regular activity, as well as each culminating activity, can be modified to be an individual or a group task, and the reviews and tests can be used as quick comprehension checks or formally scored assessments. The guides may be used in conjunction with the Barron's *Shakespeare Made Easy* texts or alone. Ultimately, the *Shakespeare Made Easy* Activity Guides are intended to assist teachers and students in gaining an increased understanding of and appreciation for the reading of Shakespeare.



Introduction to the Play

Background to *The Merchant of Venice*

The Merchant of Venice is most often considered a comedy because it ends, as most of Shakespeare's comedies do, with the promise of a triple marriage. Like *Twelfth Night*, however, the comedy is edged with darkness because of the treatment of one of the characters. In *Twelfth Night*, Malvolio is easy to dislike, but the reader feels sympathy toward him because of the way others treat him. In *The Merchant of Venice*, the Jewish businessman Shylock is dislikable, but the cruel treatment he suffers from others is very troublesome. Because Shylock is such a memorable character, many people assume that the title "The Merchant of Venice" is him. However, the merchant of the title is actually Antonio, a true and devoted friend to Bassanio.

One of the critical practices in the play is the charging of interest and the posting of a guarantee, or bond, for anyone who wishes to borrow money. This form of money-lending, called usury, was frowned upon as an unethical and unchristian way to earn money. However, in Shakespeare's era, people sometimes did need to borrow money. Therefore, many states allowed people who were not citizens to charge interest when they lent money and to extract a penalty if the money was not repaid in a timely manner. As most states would not grant citizenship to Jews, this practice became a way for many Jews in Europe to make a living.

When Shakespeare was alive, Jewish people had been exiled from Britain. That is why he set this play in Venice, Italy, where Jews were still allowed to live and work. Depictions of Jews in Shakespeare's era were often negative and cruel. Therefore, the depiction of Shylock was considered fair and balanced when the play was originally produced. However, the anti-Semitism of the play is so intense for modern audiences that Shylock's victimization and humanity is often stressed more than his selfishness and harshness.

A story very similar to *The Merchant of Venice* was an Italian story called *Il Pecorone*. It was composed by Ser Giovanni in 1378 and was still in print in Italian in 1558. However, no English version has been found. The earlier Italian story has many of the same elements as Shakespeare's version. A kind uncle borrows money from a Jew to enable his nephew to woo a rich and beautiful woman who lives in Belmonte. The agreement is that if the money is not repaid, then the uncle will allow a pound of flesh to be taken from any part of his body. And so it happens that when it comes time to repay the Jew, the uncle cannot do so. The young woman comes dressed as a lawyer and asks the Jew to take a handsome sum of money instead of the pound of flesh, but the Jew refuses. Just before the pound of flesh is taken, the woman declares that if any blood is shed the Jew will be killed. The Jew then asks for the original settlement, only to be told that he must take the pound of flesh and face the penalty. In

anger and disgust, the Jew rips up the bond. In thanks, the young man takes money to the young lawyer, whom he does not recognize as his lady. She asks only for the ring that he is wearing. He does not want to give up the ring because it came from his lady. The young lawyer insists, and he does give it to her. When he returns to Belmonte, his lady asks for the ring with much distress. In the end, she tells him the truth, and they live happily ever after.

To this story, Shakespeare adds the story of the three caskets: one made of gold, one made of silver, and one made of lead. Earlier stories told of a young man winning true love only by choosing the correct casket. The combination of these two tales gives *The Merchant of Venice* an engaging plot and the memorable character of Portia.

Portia, disguised as a lawyer, is most famous for her speech about mercy. Mercy, she says, cannot be forced. It is as refreshing as rain sent from heaven. It gives a double blessing, benefitting not only the receiver but also the grantor. The stronger someone is, the more profound is his mercy. A king who rules with mercy has more glory than a king with a jewel-covered crown. When a king holds his scepter, it shows his power and inspires fear. But when a king shows mercy, he demonstrates even more might and power. When we are merciful, we are acting in the image of God. So even when we have a right to justice, we should choose mercy instead, because we are all sinners in need of mercy. We are lost if we receive only the punishment we are due. Only mercy leads to true salvation.

Synopsis of *The Merchant of Venice*

Act one, Scene 1

On a street in Venice, Antonio, Salerio, and Solanio talk about Antonio's sadness. Salerio and Solanio tell Antonio that he is sad because he has so much at risk with his shipping business. Antonio denies this, saying he has several different merchant ships and not all of his fortune is involved in his ships currently at sea. He also denies that he is in love. Solanio says that Antonio is sad but could just as easily be happy.

Bassanio, Lorenzo, and Gratiano also enter the scene. Gratiano says he enjoys playing the clown and distrusts those who are quiet and reserved. When he leaves with Lorenzo, Bassanio tells Antonio he needs money to properly woo Portia. She has indicated that she likes him, and marrying her would solve his money problems. Antonio admits that he doesn't have enough money to help Bassanio right then, but he will borrow money to help his friend.

Act one, Scene 2

Portia expresses her dismay at the suitors who have come to her home in Belmont, a little town on a hill not far from Venice. Every suitor falls short in her eyes. Nerissa reminds Portia that her father was probably wise to set up a test for whomever would marry Portia. There are three caskets. One is gold, one is silver, and one is lead. Inside one casket is a picture of Portia. The suitor who chooses that casket is the right man for Portia.

Portia lists the shortfallings of each suitor so far. The Neapolitan prince is obsessed with horses; the Count Palatine is too mournful; the French gentleman, Monsieur Le Bon, is a horrible combination of all the other suitors; the English baron, Falconbridge, is vain, collects his wardrobe from everywhere in Europe, and behaves badly; the Scottish lord is too quick to fight with the Englishman; and the German nephew of the Duke of Saxony is a drunkard. However, she is interested in Bassanio.

A servingman enters to proclaim the arrival of the Prince of Morocco, but Portia does not like the Moroccan prince either.

Act one, Scene 3

Back in Venice, Bassanio explains to Shylock that he needs to borrow three thousand ducats for three months, and that Antonio will guarantee the loan. Antonio enters, and Shylock, in an aside, explains that he hates Antonio for lending money at no interest and because Antonio dislikes Jewish people. Shylock defends his moneymaking strategies by telling the story of Jacob and the parti-colored lambs to show that making a profit is a good thing.

As Shylock calculates the interest he will charge Antonio, he reminds Antonio of all the times he has called him a dog and spit upon him. He sarcastically asks Antonio how a dog can lend him money. Antonio responds with no apology. He asks to receive the money as an enemy, and then if there is any problem, Shylock is free to enjoy any penalty that would come to Antonio.

Shylock responds by saying he wants no money if the repayment if forfeited. Instead, if Antonio cannot repay Shylock on the appointed day, Antonio will give up a pound of flesh that Shylock can cut from anywhere on Antonio's body.

Bassanio is hesitant about this deal, but Antonio is confident that he will get the money from his merchant ships a full month before the money is due to Shylock. Antonio agrees to go before the notary and sign off on the agreement.

Act two, Scene 1

The Prince of Morocco enters Portia's house accompanied by fanfare of coronets. The Prince speaks of his bravery and love and that Portia should care about his character and not his complexion. Portia reminds him that if he does not choose the correct casket, he cannot speak to any other lady about marriage. The Prince agrees to the conditions of the test.

Act two, Scene 2

Back in Venice, Lancelot the clown complains about his work for Shylock. He wishes to run away from his service, but his conscience tells him to remain with Shylock. In the end, Lancelot decides to leave Shylock. Lancelot comes across his own blind father, and teases him by giving him confusing directions to Shylock's home. Then he further harasses his father by telling Gobbo that his son is dead. Then he asks for a blessing, saying he really is Lancelot. Gobbo does not believe him until he says that Margery was his mother and Gobbo's wife.

Lancelot tells Gobbo that he will no longer be a servant for Shylock.

Bassanio and Leonardo enter. Bassanio agrees to let Lancelot become his servant. Gratiano enters and asks to go with Bassanio to Belmont. Gratiano promises to act with all civility, rather than his usual wild and talkative self.

Act two, Scene 3

In Shylock's home, Jessica bids farewell to Lancelot. She is sad that he is leaving her because he made her life more bearable. She asks him to give a letter to Lorenzo, her boyfriend, because Lorenzo is staying with Bassanio.

Act two, Scene 4

Gratiano, Lorenzo, Salerio, and Solanio are preparing for a Venetian masque. Lancelot arrives and gives Jessica's letter to Lorenzo. The letter describes Jessica's plan to run away with Lorenzo, bringing with her money, gold, and jewels.

Act two, Scene 5

Shylock finds out from Lancelot that there are parties going on that evening. He warns Jessica to stay inside and lock the doors and windows. Shylock is going to have dinner with Bassanio, but he does not really want to go.

Act two, Scene 6

Gratiano, Salerio, and others wait in front of Shylock's home. Lorenzo enters and calls for Jessica. She throws down a chest filled with money and jewels. In order to escape without suspicion, Jessica has dressed as a boy. She wishes she were dressed in a more feminine manner. Everyone leaves except for Gratiano. He runs into Antonio, who announces that the masques have been called off because it is too windy.

Act two, Scene 7

At Portia's house, the Prince of Morocco begins his selection of the caskets. He rejects the lead casket, which says that the one who chooses it must give and hazard all he has, as a foolish choice that is a threat rather than a benefit. The silver casket promises as much as the chooser deserves. The Prince rejects the silver casket saying he deserves Portia, but that she is too good for a silver casket. The gold chest proclaims to contain what many men desire. The Prince chooses the gold casket because Portia is what any man might desire. He opens the casket with the key to read that all that glitters is not gold. It was the wrong choice. Very sad, the prince exits. However, Portia is happy that the prince chose the wrong casket.

Act two, Scene 8

Salerio and Solanio talk about Shylock's extreme distress when he discovered that Jessica had taken his money and jewels and run away with Lorenzo. Then they talk about Antonio giving Bassanio the money. Antonio wants Bassanio to forget about the consequences of the loan if he cannot repay Shylock, and wishes him success with Portia.

Act two, Scene 9

The Prince of Aragon comes to Portia's house to try his luck at winning her hand by choosing the correct casket. He rejects the lead casket. He rejects the gold casket because he feels that choosing what many other men desire is too common. He chooses the silver casket because he feels that he rightly deserves to marry Portia. He opens the silver casket to discover a poem about how foolish he is. The Prince of Aragon leaves quickly so as not to make any more of a fool of himself. A messenger arrives to announce that Bassanio is at the gate and wishes to try for Portia's hand in marriage.

Act three, Scene 1

Solanio reports to Salerio that Antonio's ship has been wrecked on a narrow place of the English Channel. Shylock enters and cannot believe that Jessica would run away. Salerio tells him that Antonio's ship is lost at sea, but that he is sure that Shylock will not claim the pound of Antonio's flesh. But Shylock replies that he desires revenge just as any Christian might desire revenge, and that he is as human as any Christian.

Tubal enters and reports that he has not been able to find Jessica and Lorenzo. Shylock is very upset at her stealing his money and jewels. He grows even more upset when Tubal tells him that Jessica spent eighty ducats in one night in Genoa. However, Antonio is having even worse luck because another one of his merchant ships is shipwrecked in Tripoli. Shylock plans his revenge on Antonio if he cannot repay the debt. Tubal then tells of a report that Jessica traded a turquoise ring for a monkey. Shylock loved that ring because it came from his wife, and he would not have traded it for "a wilderness of monkeys."

Act three, Scene 2

Portia asks Bassanio to delay choosing a casket so that they can spend more time together. Bassanio cannot postpone his choice, and asks to be able to take the test. Bassanio rejects gold as too gaudy and silver as too common. He chooses the paleness of the lead casket. When Bassanio opens the lead casket, he finds a beautiful picture of Portia. He praises the beauty and likeness of the portrait. He then reads a poem that tells him that because he did not choose for outward appearance, he can win the hand of Portia and claim her with a kiss. Bassanio wishes to marry Portia, but is unsure whether or not she really wants him.

Portia expresses her love for Bassanio, and gives him her house, her servants, and herself by giving him a ring. She tells Bassanio that if the ring is lost or given away that his love will also be ruined. Bassanio promises that the only way he will be parted from the ring is at his death. Gratiano asks to be able to marry Portia's maid Nerissa. Nerissa indicates that she would be pleased to marry Gratiano.

Lorenzo, Jessica, Salerio, and a messenger from Venice arrive. Salerio gives a letter to Bassanio, and delivers the sad news that Antonio has lost all his ships and is now unable to repay Shylock. Shylock has vowed to take nothing but Antonio's pound of flesh in payment for his loan, and will listen to no other entreaties.

Portia offers to pay Shylock much more than the original three thousand ducats. She tells Bassanio to go to Antonio and help him pay the debt. Bassanio reads the letter from Antonio that tells that he has forfeited the debt and must pay the penalty to Shylock. He leaves, with Portia's blessing, to settle the matter.

Act three, Scene 3

In Venice, Antonio is under arrest for failure to pay his debt to Shylock. Antonio, accompanied by Solanio, pleads with Shylock for mercy, but Shylock insists on having his bond. Shylock hates Antonio because, in addition to insulting Shylock by calling him a dog, Antonio would pay others' debts to Shylock, and then Shylock would not make the profit he was counting on. Solanio tries to comfort Antonio with hope that the Duke of Venice will not allow Antonio to pay a pound of flesh. But Antonio responds that the law is the law, and his only hope is to see Bassanio before he dies.

Act three, Scene 4

At Portia's house in Belmont, Portia, Nerissa, Lorenzo, Jessica, and Portia's servingman Balthazar are gathered together to talk about Antonio's situation. Portia announces that she and Nerissa will go to a convent, and that Lorenzo will be in charge of her house while she is gone. When Jessica and Lorenzo leave, Portia sends Balthazar to fetch some special clothes from her cousin and bring them to her at the Venice ferry station. She then tells Nerissa that they are going to dress as men for a good purpose.

Act three, Scene 5

Lancelot teases Jessica about being Jewish. Even though her husband will convert her to Christianity, she is still at fault because she can now eat pork and therefore the price of pork will go up in the marketplace. Lorenzo enters and asks Lancelot to have all the servants get dinner ready, but Lancelot continues his teasing by pretending to misunderstand Lorenzo's requests. Lancelot leaves to get dinner ready, and Jessica praises Portia's character. Teasing one another, they go in to supper.

Act four, Scene 1

In the Venetian Court of Justice, the Duke of Venice enters accompanied by the Judges, called Magnificoes, various law clerks, Antonio, Bassanio, Salerio, and Gratiano. Once the judges are seated, the Duke pleads with Shylock to show mercy to Antonio. Shylock demands his bond, and no less. Antonio remarks that it is futile to think that Shylock will change his mind. Bassanio offers six thousand ducats to pay for Antonio's debt, but Shylock refuses the money. The Duke asks Shylock how he ever expects to receive any mercy if he will never give any. Shylock points out that the Christians have slaves that they treat as less than human, and if Shylock would ask them to release their slaves and let them marry their children, all of them would refuse. Similarly, he has a right to his bond, and the law of Venice supports his right to collect. In response, Gratiano calls Shylock a base dog and a brutal wolf.

Introduced by a letter from Dr. Bellario, Portia enters disguised as a young lawyer named Balthazar. In questioning Shylock, Portia invites Shylock to choose mercy over justice because under justice we are all condemned, but only with mercy can anyone be saved. Shylock, however, demands justice as stated in the law.

Portia then asks if there is money to repay the debt, and Bassanio offers much more than the original three thousand ducats. However, Portia replies that it is too late; the law demands the payment of the bond. To take the money would negate the law. Shylock is very pleased that Portia understands his position and calls her "A Daniel come to judgment."

Once more Portia pleads with Shylock to tear up the bond and take nine thousand ducats instead and show mercy, but Shylock once again refuses. Portia tells Antonio to prepare to give his pound of flesh. Antonio proclaims that he is willing to die as a show of his love and loyalty to Bassanio. He only asks that Bassanio tell his wife of Antonio's love and that Bassanio should only regret that he has lost a friend. Bassanio and Gratiano both say that they would sacrifice their marriages if it would save Antonio's life.

Right before Shylock is going to take Antonio's life, Portia points out that the bond only allows for the taking of flesh, not the spilling of any blood. Therefore, if Shylock sheds any of Antonio's blood, he will have to give up all his land and goods to the state of Venice. Immediately, Shylock says he will take the nine thousand ducats. Bassanio offers the money, but Portia insists that justice demands that Shylock take the penalty. If he sheds any blood, or takes any little bit more than an exact pound, Shylock will be sentenced to death and all his goods taken by the state.

Shylock offers to take only his three thousand ducats, but Portia insists that he follow through with the forfeiture. Shylock then renounces all claims on his money, but Portia accuses Shylock of planning to kill Antonio. The laws of Venice declare that anyone who seeks to kill a Venetian will be sentenced to death unless given mercy by the Duke of Venice. In further consequence, Shylock must give up half his goods to his intended victim and the other half to the state. Portia tells Shylock to beg mercy from the Duke. The Duke pardons Shylock's life but still takes all his money for Antonio and for the state. Antonio requests instead that the court forgive the fine of one half of Shylock's goods in exchange for his use of the money in trust until Shylock dies, at which time the money will go to Jessica and Lorenzo. However, for this to take place, Shylock must make his daughter and Lorenzo his full heirs, and Shylock must become a Christian. Shylock agrees.

Bassanio tries to give Portia the three thousand ducats as payment for her services, but she refuses. When he insists, she says instead that she will take his gloves and ring. Bassanio refuses to give up the ring, telling her that his wife made him vow never to sell, give, or lose it. Portia accuses him of reneging on his offer, and she leaves. Antonio pleads with Bassanio to give Portia the ring as thanks for saving his life and

as a sign of love to Antonio. Bassanio sends Gratiano to give Portia his ring.

Act four, Scene 2

Gratiano finds Portia and Nerissa and gives Portia the ring. Nerissa accompanies Gratiano to Shylock's house, planning to get the ring she gave Gratiano.

Act five, Scene 1

Outside Portia's house in Belmont, Lorenzo and Jessica, playing word games, compare themselves to the famous lovers Troilus and Cressida, Pyramus and Thisbe, Dido and Aeneas, and Medea and Jason. They are interrupted by Stephano and Lancelot, who announce that Portia and Nerissa, as well as Bassanio, will be arriving home shortly. Jessica and Lorenzo remain outside a bit longer to enjoy the night sky and the music.

Portia and Nerissa arrive, and shortly afterward Bassanio, Antonio, Gratiano, and their followers also arrive. Nerissa accuses Gratiano of being untrue because he gave her ring away to a law clerk. Portia agrees that Gratiano is not faithful, noting that Bassanio would never give away the ring she gave to him.

However, Bassanio admits that he gave Portia's ring to the lawyer who defended Antonio before the Duke. Portia is very upset with Bassanio, and berates him for giving the ring away. Antonio offers to pledge his soul to support Bassanio's claim that he will never break another vow to Portia ever again.

Portia takes Antonio's pledge, and gives him her ring to give to Bassanio, with a warning not to lose it again. Nerissa gives Gratiano her ring also. Portia and Nerissa say they got these rings by sleeping with the lawyer and the clerk.

Before any more mischief can happen, Portia and Nerissa admit that they were the lawyer and the clerk, and she has a letter from Bellario to prove it. She gives Antonio another letter that proves that his merchant ships have arrived safely from their voyages. Then Nerissa gives to Lorenzo and Jessica the deed from Shylock that gives to them all his possessions after he dies. They all go into the house to talk about these wonderful events in more detail.

Annotated Character List for *The Merchant of Venice*

The Duke of Venice: In addition to being the ruler of Venice, he decides the verdicts in legal disputes between Venetians.

The Prince of Morocco: He travels to Belmont to seek Portia's hand in marriage. He has a dark complexion that is burnished by the sun.

The Prince of Aragon: He is another suitor of Portia. He does not want to choose the casket that appeals to many, but feels that he deserves to marry Portia.

Antonio: The merchant of Venice. His wealth comes from various ships that sail and trade the world. To his friends, he is generous, loyal, and kind. However, he acts in hateful ways toward Shylock.

Bassanio: A close friend to Antonio. He is a suitor to Portia. Because he has spent too

much money in his younger days, he must borrow money to support his wooing of Portia.

Solanio: He is a good friend to Antonio and Bassanio.

Salerio: He is also a good friend to Antonio and Bassanio.

Gratiano: He is friends with Antonio and Bassanio. He is attracted to Portia's lady-in-waiting, Nerissa. He loves to talk loudly and joke often.

Shylock: A rich Jew who makes his living by lending money and collecting interest or the collateral if the loan is not repaid in a timely manner. He is controlling and harsh, but has suffered indignities at the hands of Christians, especially Antonio.

Tubal: A Jewish friend of Shylock

Jessica: Daughter of Shylock. She is in love with Lorenzo, who is not Jewish.

Lancelot Gobbo: A clown who serves Shylock. He desires to change masters.

Old Gobbo: Father to Lancelot

Lorenzo: A friend of Antonio and Bassanio, he is in love with Jessica.

Leonardo: A servant to Bassanio

Balthazar: A servant to Portia

Stephano: A servant to Portia

Portia: A beautiful rich woman who has inherited her father's estate. She cannot marry whomever she wants, but must marry the suitor who chooses the casket that has her picture inside of it. She travels to Venice disguised as a lawyer to win the case of Shylock against Antonio.

Nerissa: The lady-in-waiting to Portia. She is her helper and advisor, and accompanies her to Venice disguised as a law clerk.

Magnificoes of Venice: Senior magistrates of the court

Officers of the Court of Justice: Men who oversee the proceedings of cases brought before the court

Jailer: He is responsible for Antonio when he is under arrest.

Servants to Portia: Provide help managing Portia's home in Belmont

Other Attendants: People who provide support to their superiors

Shakespeare and Stage Directions

The plays of Shakespeare are so well written that they seem to leap off the page and come to life. However, the plays themselves have very few stage directions. Perhaps this is because Shakespeare's plays were performed in large amphitheaters that were very simple.

This was a time before electric lights, so the plays needed to take place during the day to utilize the natural light. The average time for a performance was between noon and two in the afternoon. Theater historians report that there were typically no intermissions; plays ran from beginning to end without a break and took about two hours.

The set might be painted canvas to illustrate whether the play was occurring in a forest or a town, for example. Sometimes the background was accompanied by a sign that indicated the

place as well. Props were few and large: a table, a chariot, gallows, a bed, or a throne.

However, the audience in Shakespeare's plays expected a spectacle for the price of admission. Therefore, there were many devices to produce a gasp from the audience. For example, a device in the loft of the theater could raise and lower actors so that they could play gods, ghosts, or other unusual characters. Additionally, a trapdoor in the stage offered a chance for a quick appearance or disappearance. The actors could suggest a beheading or hanging with various illusions on the stage. Sound effects suggesting thunder, horses, or war were common. Music was important, and drums and horns were often played.

Most important to the sense of spectacle were the costumes worn by the actors. These were elaborate, colorful, and very expensive. Therefore, they often purchased these outfits from servants who had inherited the clothes from their masters, or from hangmen, who received the clothes of their victims as payment for their services.

Though Shakespeare's stage directions are sparse, definition of a few key terms will be helpful for the reader. The following is a brief glossary of stage directions commonly found in Shakespeare's plays.

Selected Glossary of Stage Directions in Shakespeare's Plays

Above: an indication that the actor speaking from above is on a higher balcony or other scaffold that is higher than the other actors

Alarum: a stage signal, which calls the soldiers to battle; usually trumpets, drums, and shouts

Aside: words spoken by the actor so the audience overhears but the other actors on the stage do not. An aside may also be spoken to one other actor so that the others on stage do not overhear.

Calls within: a voice offstage that calls to a character on the stage

Curtains: Curtains were fabrics draped around a bed that could be opened or closed for privacy.

Draw: Actors pull their swords from their sheathes.

Enter: a direction for a character to enter the stage. This can be from the audience's right (stage left) or the audience's left (stage right).

Enter Chorus: a direction for an actor to come to the center of the stage and offer some introductory comments, usually in blank verse or rhyming couplets. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the Chorus delivers a sonnet, a form of poetry associated with love.

Exeunt: All characters leave the stage, or those characters named leave the stage.

Exit: One character leaves the stage.

Flourish: A group of trumpets or other horn instruments play a brief melody.

Have at: Characters begin to fight, usually with swords.

Pageant: a show or spectacle of actors in unusual costumes, usually without words

Prologue: an introduction spoken by the Chorus that gives an overview to the audience and invites them into the play or scene

Retires: A character slips away.

Sennet: a series of notes sounded on brass instruments to announce the approach or departure of a procession

Singing: a signal for the actor to sing the following lines as a tune

Within: voices or sounds occurring offstage but heard by the audience



Introduction to Shakespeare

A Brief Biography of William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare was born in April 1564 to John and Mary Shakespeare in Stratford-upon-Avon, England. His birthday is celebrated on April 23. This is memorable because April 23 is also the day Shakespeare died in 1616.

Shakespeare was the eldest of nine children in his family, six of whom survived to adulthood.

William Shakespeare's father worked with leather and became a successful merchant early in his career. He held some relatively important government offices. However, when William was in his early teens, his father's financial position began to slide due to growing debt. After many years, John Shakespeare's fortunes and respect were restored, but records indicate that the years of debt and lawsuits were very stressful.

Historians assume that young Will went to school and took a rigorous course of study including Latin, history, and biblical study. In 1582, at the age of eighteen, he married Anne Hathaway, who was three months pregnant. Studies of Elizabethan family life indicate that Anne's situation was not unusual since it was accepted that the engagement period was as legally binding as the marriage. The couple had a daughter, Susanna, followed by twins, Hamnet and Judith. Not much is known about Shakespeare during the next seven years, but his name is listed as an actor in London by 1592. This was a difficult time for the theater because measures to prevent the spread of the plague regularly closed the theaters.

Between 1594 and 1595, Shakespeare joined the Chamberlain's Men as a playwright and actor. The acting company featured actor Richard Burbage, and they were a favorite of Queen Elizabeth I. During this time, Shakespeare was writing such plays as *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* Even though Shakespeare was enjoying great success by the time he was 32, it was dampened by the death of his son, Hamnet, in 1596. Soon after, Shakespeare refocused on his home in Stratford where he bought an estate called New Place, with gardens, orchards, and barns in addition to the main home. He still maintained a home in London near the theater.

In 1599, Shakespeare wrote *Henry V*, *Julius Caesar*, and *As You Like It.* The Globe Playhouse was up and running, with Shakespeare a 10 percent owner. This means that he was able to earn 10 percent of any show's profits. This business position helped him solidify his wealth.

In 1603, Shakespeare's reputation earned his acting troop the sponsorship of James I, who requested one play performance per month. Their name changed to the King's Men. By this time, Shakespeare had written and performed in almost all of his comedies and histories. He was proclaimed the finest playwright in London.

But Shakespeare still had what is considered his finest writing to do. He began his writing of tragedies beginning with *Hamlet* in 1600. In the following five years, Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *King Lear*. Why Shakespeare turned to these darker, more serious themes is widely debated by scholars. But all agree that these plays established Shakespeare's premier place in English literature.

Toward the end of 1609 through 1610, Shakespeare began to write his problem romances. These works, *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Tempest*, are rich with mature themes of forgiveness, grace, and redemption.

After 1611, at the age of 47, Shakespeare moved back to Stratford exclusively, settling into life at New Place and enjoying a renewed relationship with his daughters, especially Susanna. He prepared a will, which has become famous for the request to leave his wife their "second best bed." Many have debated whether this is a sentimental or cynical bequest. In the same year that his daughter Judith married, 1616, Shakespeare died at the age of 52. However, it was not until 1623 that all his plays were collected into one manuscript, now referred to as the *First Folio*. The fellow King's Men players who compiled the manuscript, Heming and Condell, entitled it *Mr. William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies*.

Shakespeare's England

The age of Shakespeare was a glorious time for England. William Shakespeare's life in England was defined by the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558–1603). During her leadership, England became an important naval and economic force in Europe and beyond.

England's rise to power came when its navy defeated the Spanish Armada in 1588, when Shakespeare was about 24 years old. Queen Elizabeth was skillful in navigating through the conflicts of religion. She maintained religious independence from Rome as the Church of England became firmly rooted during her reign. Additionally, she financed the establishment of colonies in America to grow the British Empire and expand its economic opportunities. At the end of her reign, England was the leader in trade, naval power, and culture.

Because of its role as the main economic, political, and cultural center of England, London became the hub of England's prosperity and fame. If anyone wanted to become famous as a poet or dramatic writer during Shakespeare's time, he would need to be in London. In fact, London was full of great writers besides Shakespeare, such as Marlowe, Sidney, and Jonson. Yet, even as London was full of parties, trade, and amusement, it was also full of poverty, crime, and disease. Crime was a large problem, and the main jail in London was called the Clink. Disease and poor sanitation were common. In fact, twice in Shakespeare's lifetime, London endured an outbreak of the plague, which killed thousands upon thousands of people.

Before Queen Elizabeth took the throne, London was a modestly sized city of about 60,000 people. By the time James I took the throne at her death, more than 200,000 people

lived in London and its suburbs. People were attracted to London because it gave many opportunities for work and financial improvement. It was also home to a vibrant social scene for the upper class. In fact, one honor of being a noble was the opportunity to house Queen Elizabeth and her entire party if she was in your neighborhood. If she was a guest, it was expected that her noble hosts would cover all the expenses of housing her group. She made many "progresses" through England and London, establishing her relationships with the nobility. However, several nobles asked to be released from this honor because the expense of supporting her visit had often caused them bankruptcy.

Perhaps it was better to be a flourishing member of the English merchant middle class. Their numbers and influence were rising in England at the time of Shakespeare. This was a new and an exciting development in Western European history. One major factor in the rise of the middle class was the need for wool for clothing. The expansion of the wool trade led to the formation of entire cities throughout England, and sparked progress in many other areas of commerce and trade.

With the rise of the middle class came a concern for more comfortable housing. Rather than serving simply as shelter or defense against attack, housing developed architecturally and functionally. One major improvement was the use of windows to let in light. Also, houses were built with lofts and special places for eating and sleeping, rather than having one multifunctional room. However, doors between rooms were still very rare, so that privacy in Shakespeare's time did not really exist.

Meals in Shakespeare's England were an important part of the day. Breakfast was served before dawn and was usually bread and a beverage. Therefore, everyone was really hungry for the midday meal, which could last up to three hours. If meat was available in the home, it was usually served at this time. A smaller supper was eaten at 6:00 or 7:00 P.M., with the more wealthy people able to eat earlier and the working class eating later. Cooking was dangerous and difficult since all meals were cooked over an open fire. Even bread was not baked in an oven but was cooked in special pans placed over the fire. A pot was almost always cooking on the fire, and the cook would put in whatever was available for supper. This is most likely where the term "potluck" came from.

Furniture was usually made of carved wood, as woodcarving was a developing craft in Shakespeare's day. One important part of an Elizabethan home was the table, or "board." One side was finished to a nice sheen, while the other side was rough. Meals were served on the rough side of the board, and then it was flipped for a more elegant look in the room. The table is where we get the terms "room and board" and having "the tables turned." Another important part of a middle or an upper-class home was the bed. Rather than being made of prickly straw, mattresses were now stuffed with softer feathers. Surrounded by artistically carved four posts, these beds were considered so valuable that they were often a specifically named item in a will.

Clothing in Shakespeare's time was very expensive. Of course, servants and other lower-class people wore simple garb, often a basic blue. But if a person wanted to display his wealth, his clothing was elaborate and colorful, sewn with rich velvet, lace, and gold braid. An average worker might earn seven or eight English pounds in a year, and a very nice outfit for a nobleman might cost as much as 50 or 60 pounds. In other words, if seven or eight healthy workers pooled their money for the entire year, spending nothing else, they could buy only one respectable nobleman's outfit.

Entertainment was an important part of life in Shakespeare's England. Popular sports were bear-baiting, cockfighting, and an early form of bowling. Bear-baiting, in which dogs were set loose to fight with a chained bear in the center of an amphitheater, and cockfighting, in which roosters pecked each other to death, were popular then but would be absolutely unacceptable entertainment today. Bowling, however, has maintained its popularity in our current culture.

In London, a main source of entertainment was the theater. Some theaters were very large and could hold more than two thousand people. Even poor people could attend the theater since entrance cost only one penny (equivalent to 60 cents today), and they could stand around the stage. For a bit more money, a person could sit in an actual seat during the performance. However, some thought that going to the theater could be dangerous to your body or your soul. The theaters were closed twice during the plagues to reduce the spread of the disease. The Puritans disapproved of the theater as an unwholesome leisure time activity. And the Puritans also disliked the theater because the theaters were located in an area of London surrounded by brothels and bars. Nevertheless, the theater became respectable enough by 1603 to be supported by James I—and he was the monarch who directed the King James Version of the Bible to be translated.

Student Name ______________________________ Date ____________



ACTIVITY 1

Introducing the Melancholy Antonio Act one, Scene 1

Background Much like the sad Romeo in *Romeo and Juliet*, in this play, the melancholy Antonio listens as his friends try to explain to him why they think he is sad and what he should do to make himself feel better.

Directions Answer the following questions based on the speeches in Act one, Scene 1 to get a sense of what Antonio is like and what might be the cause for his sadness. Use another sheet of paper, if necessary.

1. What does Salerio assume is the cause of Antonio's sadness? (lines 8–14)

2. According to lines 23–40, what occupies Salerio's thoughts most of the time?

3. According to lines 41–45, why is Antonio not overly concerned about his money and investments?

4. According to Solanio, there are two types of extreme personality types. What are they?

5. Besides money, what else does Antonio rule out as the reason for his melancholy?

6. When Gratiano enters, he gives a rather long speech about the foolishness of wallowing in melancholy, and he describes one type of man that really irritates him. In your own words, describe this type that Gratiano disdains.

7. When Bassanio enters, the focus shifts to his worries and problems, which are primarily financial in nature. What does he ask of Antonio?

8. What does Antonio's willingness to help his friend (repeatedly) show about him?

Student Name ______________________________ Date ____________



ACTIVITY 2

Portia's Assessment of Her Suitors

Act one, Scene 2

Background On his deathbed, Portia's father created a riddle for her future suitors: whoever correctly chooses between caskets of gold, silver, and lead wins her hand in marriage. In this scene, Portia discusses her many suitors with her maid.

Directions Paraphrase what Portia has to say about each potential suitor.

	Portia's Assessment of Suitors
Neapolitan Prince	
Count Palatine	
Monsieur Le Bon	
Falconbridge (English Baron)	
Duke of Saxony's Nephew	
Bassanio	

Student Name ______________________________ Date __________

ACTIVITY 3

Introducing Shylock

Act one, Scene 3

Background Shylock is one of Shakespeare's most controversial characters; some declare him a villain and some a misunderstood hero.

Directions Shylock has many lines in this scene that provide insight into his character. Answer the following questions to the best of your ability. Use another sheet of paper, if necessary.

1. What is a good man to Shylock? (lines 14–17)

2. Why won't Shylock eat with Bassanio and Antonio? (lines 29–34)

3. Why does Shylock dislike Antonio? (lines 36–40)

4. How does Shylock plan to get the better of Antonio? (lines 41–47)

5. What is the penalty if Antonio is unable to repay Shylock within three months? (lines 140–148)

6. How does Shylock make light of this penalty? (lines 157–167)

7. After this scene, would you characterize Shylock as a good or bad man? Why?

Student Name ______________________ Date __________

ACTIVITY 4

Character Assessment

Act one

Background This first act provides insight into the essential values of each of the characters.

Directions

1. First, decide how important the following values are to Antonio, Bassanio, and Shylock by giving each a rating of 1 to 4, 1 being least important and 4 most important.
2. Find a line from Act one that supports your assessment, and write a brief explanation. Use another sheet of paper, if necessary.

Values	Antonio	Bassanio	Shylock
Loyalty/ Friendship	Rating: Line/explanation:	Rating: Line/explanation:	Rating: Line/explanation:
Wealth	Rating: Line/explanation:	Rating: Line/explanation:	Rating: Line/explanation:
Happiness	Rating: Line/explanation:	Rating: Line/explanation:	Rating: Line/explanation:
Honesty	Rating: Line/explanation:	Rating: Line/explanation:	Rating: Line/explanation:
Appearances	Rating: Line/explanation:	Rating: Line/explanation:	Rating: Line/explanation:

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ACTIVITY 5

Review

Directions Based on the events of the first act, decide whether the following statements are true or false. Write T for true and F for false on the line provided.

_____ 1. Antonio is worried about his loan from Shylock.

_____ 2. Bassanio forced Antonio to borrow money from Shylock.

_____ 3. Portia's suitors must defeat each other in hand-to-hand combat in order to win her hand.

_____ 4. Antonio has two months in which to repay Shylock.

_____ 5. Shylock is a Christian.

_____ 6. At the beginning of the play, Bassanio is depressed but doesn't know why.

_____ 7. The woman Bassanio wishes to court lives in Belmont.

_____ 8. Nerissa has many suitors.

_____ 9. Shylock and Antonio are old friends.

_____ 10. A pound of flesh will be taken from Bassanio if he doesn't repay Antonio's loan for him.

Student Name ____________________ Date ________



ACTIVITY 6

The Prince of Morocco Takes a Chance Act two, Scene 1

Background In this scene, the Prince of Morocco speaks articulately—and proudly—of himself as a fine suitor for Portia. He admits, however, that this riddle of the caskets introduces chance into the quest for Portia—anyone could potentially win or lose. In this scene, we learn that any suitor who takes a chance must first vow that if he chooses incorrectly, he will never marry. Although the stakes are high, the Prince of Morocco decides to take the chance.

Directions Imagine that you are the Prince of Morocco alone with your thoughts and prayers at the temple. Write your thoughts down on a separate sheet of paper, and consider including the following:

- What you think the casket of gold, silver, and lead might mean/symbolize and which you are considering choosing (and why)
- Why you think Portia is worth the risk of never marrying
- Your sworn vows (to never marry should you choose the wrong casket)
- Some sort of prayer, wish, or supplication that you might choose correctly

Suggested length: ½ to 1 page

Student Name ______________________________ Date __________



ACTIVITY 7

Jessica's Letter to Lorenzo

Act two, Scenes 3 and 4

Background In this act, Lancelot, Shylock's servant, runs away because Shylock is "the devil himself." Later, Shylock's daughter Jessica claims that she is ashamed of her father and wishes to marry Lorenzo, a Christian. She has written a letter for Lancelot to deliver to Lorenzo (a friend of Bassanio, who has hired Lancelot).

Directions Lines 30– 40 in Scene 4 summarize, but do not give the exact details of, Jessica's letter to her secret love, Lorenzo. Reread these lines and compose the letter detailing how they will meet, what she will bring, what she will be disguised as, what they will plan to do, and so forth, during the masque that will be held that night. Suggested length: ½ to 1 page

Student Name ______________________________ Date ____________

ACTIVITY 8

Morocco's Choice

Act two, Scene 6

Background In this scene, Morocco carefully considers the meaning of each casket and why he should or should not choose it.

Directions Reread lines 13–60, in which Morocco ponders the meaning of the riddle on each casket, and then paraphrase/summarize his thoughts about each riddle/casket choice. Use another sheet of paper, if necessary.

What does he say about the casket of lead?

What does he say about the casket of silver?

What does he say about the casket of gold?

Student Name ____________________ Date __________



ACTIVITY 9

Shylock

Acts one and two

Background In Act two, Scene 7, we learn that Shylock's daughter has run away to marry Lorenzo, a Christian. Seemingly equally upsetting to Shylock is the fact that she has stolen money and jewels from her father before she ran away to be secretly married. Is Shylock an evil man, devil incarnate, as his former servant has stated, or simply a materialistic but misunderstood person? You decide.

Directions First, in a sentence or two, rewrite the following quotations in your own words, and then explain what each shows us about Shylock's character. Use a separate sheet of paper, if necessary.

1. "I will buy with you, sell with you, talk with you, walk with you, and so following: but I will not eat with you, drink with you, nor pray with you." Act one, Scene 3, lines 30–34

2. "If I can catch him once upon the hip, I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him . . . Cursed be my tribe, If I forgive him!" Act one, Scene 3, lines 41, 42, 46, and 47

3. ". . . . let the forfeit be nominated for an equal pound of your fair flesh, to be cut off and taken in what part of your body pleaseth me." Act one, Scene 3, lines 145–148

4. "My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter! Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats! Justice! the law! my ducats, and my daughter!" Act two, Scene 8, lines 15–17 (as quoted by Solanio)

Student Name ______________________________ Date __________



ACTIVITY 10
Review

Directions Match the following characters with their descriptions. Write the letter of the correct character in the space provided. All names will be used at least once.

a. Antonio	d. Morocco	g. Jessica
b. Bassanio	e. Shylock	h. Lorenzo
c. Portia	f. Lancelot	i. Gratiano

_____ 1. steals from her father to marry a man her father would disapprove of

_____ 2. borrows money from his friend in order to court Portia

_____ 3. chooses the casket of gold

_____ 4. lends money to a friend

_____ 5. lends money to an enemy

_____ 6. his wife-to-be pretends to be his torchbearer

_____ 7. wishes to be Bassanio's servant

_____ 8. promises his friend that he will behave when he accompanies him to Belmont

_____ 9. has a deceased father who has determined the manner through which she will be married

_____ 10. is in love with Portia

Student Name ______________________________ Date __________

ACTIVITY 11

Shylock's Famous Speech

Act three, Scene 1

Background Shylock's speech in this scene is most likely the most famous of the play. It is where some scholars claim Shylock's humanity shines through for the first time.

Directions Answer the questions that follow in order to better understand Shylock's dramatic speech. Use a separate sheet of paper, if necessary.

In lines 44 to 48, Shylock insists that he will exact the pound-of-flesh payment from Antonio and describes all of the wrongs he has suffered at Antonio's hands. List them here.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

Questions

1. According to Shylock, why has Antonio done all of these things?

2. What's the point of the "Hath not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands, organs, . . . affections, passions . . .?" portion of the speech? What is Shylock saying to Antonio's Christian friends about the way he [Shylock] feels at being scorned in this manner?

3. Reread Shylock's entire speech, starting with line 44 and ending with line 60. What does this speech say about the differences (or similarities) between Jews and Christians, or between anyone of different religions, for that matter?

Student Name ______________________ Date __________



ACTIVITY 12

Bassanio's Choice and Yours

Act three, Scene 2

Background Bassanio is the third suitor we see who contemplates aloud the meaning of the riddle on each casket and then chooses. His contemplation is quite different from the other two and focuses more on how looks are often deceptive.

Directions Reread Bassanio's speech in lines 72–107 and, summarizing it and paring it down to its very essence, put it in modern-day speech as if you were on a game show speculating which door to go through (gold, silver, or lead) to win the grand prize of a million dollars. Keep the basic message/theme of the speech intact, and rework it as you contemplate which door to open.

Student Name ______________________ Date __________



ACTIVITY 13

Appeals

Act three, Scene 2

Background In this scene, the newly engaged Bassanio discovers the serious trouble that Antonio is in; the ships carrying his fortunes have failed, and Shylock is demanding his pound of flesh. Even as high-ranking people rally around Antonio to plead his case, Shylock continually pleads his own case to the Duke so that he may exact his revenge upon Antonio.

Directions Choose a plea to make: either a high-ranking gentleman asking Shylock to show mercy for Antonio, or Shylock pleading his case for the law (and the payment of a pound of flesh) to prevail. Use any information in past acts/scenes that you can in order to stay true to character and story. Use another sheet of paper, if necessary. Suggested length: $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 page.

Student Name ______________________________ Date ____________



ACTIVITY 14

A Portrait of Portia

Background Portia is an interesting and complex character. What do her reactions to the situations she has been part of show about her as a person? You decide.

Directions Make some judgments about Portia as a person based on her lines and reactions to the situations listed below. Use a separate sheet of paper, if necessary.

1. What does Portia's dismissal of her suitors in Act one, Scene 2 say about her?

2. At the end of her judgment of the various suitors, she says about the fifth: "If he [fifth suitor] have the condition of a saint and the complexion of a devil, I had rather he should shrive me than wive me." (lines 110–112) What does this line say about what she values in a man?

3. In Act three, Scene 2, after just meeting Bassanio, she laments that if he chooses the wrong casket, she may never marry him. What does this say about her?

4. After joyfully learning that Bassanio will be her husband, Portia also discovers how Bassanio is indebted to his troubled friend, Antonio, and she urges her new fiancé to go rescue his friend with her money. What does this say about her (see Act three, Scene 2) and her love/loyalty for Bassanio?

5. After Bassanio has left, Portia swears to Lorenzo that she will live in prayer and contemplation (Act three, Scene 4). Immediately after this, she tells Nerissa they will dress as men and leave for Venice (where Antonio and Bassanio will be). What might this indicate about Portia and her character?

Student Name ______________________________ Date ____________



ACTIVITY 15

Review

Act three

Directions Choose the letter of the best answer for each of the following questions concerning events in Act three, and write it in the space provided.

____ 1. When asked what good Antonio's flesh would be to him, Shylock answers, "To bait fish withal! if it will feed nothing else, it will feed my ________."

a. greed
b. bloodthirstiness
c. revenge
d. hatred

____ 2. Shylock's daughter has run away and married a Christian. In this act, what more seems to be troubling him?

a. His grandchildren will be Christians.
b. He misses his daughter terribly.
c. He is suffering from undisclosed physical ailments.
d. He is missing the money and jewels that his daughter took when she ran away.

____ 3. What thought gives Shylock comfort during his discussion with Tubal as Shylock grieves his losses?

a. the thought of his daughter returning
b. the thought of Antonio being financially ruined
c. all of his friends who offer him comfort
d. none of the above

____ 4. Which casket does Bassanio choose?

a. gold
b. silver
c. lead
d. He doesn't choose.

____ 5. What is one thing found in the casket Bassanio opens?

a. a portrait
b. a ring
c. gold pieces
d. a beautiful robe

____ 6. What does Portia give to Bassanio as a symbol of her love?

a. a lock of her hair
b. a gold locket
c. a portrait of herself
d. a ring

____ 7. What does she say concerning the gift she has given him?

a. If he gives it away, it's a sign that he does not love her anymore.
b. It is magical and will keep him safe from harm.
c. It was her late father's, and it is her most prized possession.
d. It is to be considered a down payment on her dowry.

(continued)

Student Name ______________________________ Date ____________



ACTIVITY 15
Review *(continued)*

____ 8. What other couple has recently fallen in love and decided to marry?

a. Jessica and Lorenzo
b. Nerissa and Antonio
c. Nerissa and Gratiano
d. Jessica and Lancelot

____ 9. After choosing the casket, Bassanio receives a troubling letter about whom?

a. his father, who has recently taken ill
b. Gratiano
c. Antonio
d. Jessica

____ 10. After reading the letter, Bassanio departs to what city?

a. Rome
b. Padua
c. Verona
d. Venice

Student Name ______________________________ Date ____________

ACTIVITY 16

Newspaper Report

Act four, Scene 1 (and Acts 1–3)

Background In Act four, Scene 1, the trial in which Shylock wants to collect his pound of flesh from Antonio has begun.

Directions Write a newspaper story based on the events leading up to the trial, using all of the information from other acts. "Interview" characters and come up with real or fabricated quotations (keeping the events and characters in context) about the events that have led to this trial date. You must also come up with a headline for your story. Use a separate sheet of paper, if necessary. Suggested length: 1 page.

Student Name ______________________________ Date ____________



ACTIVITY 17

Portia's ("Balthazar's") Reasoning Act four, Scene 1

Background In Act four, Scene 1, Portia plays the part of the learned doctor of law serving as an expert witness as to whether or not the pound of flesh should be exacted from Antonio. Her speeches are lengthy, complex, and important.

Directions Fill in the blanks of the chart below outlining Portia's speeches. Reread the speeches, focusing on the theme of the particular lines as listed. Next, write them in your own words, and briefly explain any unclear meanings in order to better understand this lengthy and life-saving interaction. Use a separate sheet of paper, if necessary.

Lines	Summary with Brief Explanation
Mercy/Lines 181–202	
Venetian Laws/ Lines 215–219	
Bond and Blood/ Lines 302–309	
Details of the Flesh Debt/ Lines 320–328	
Law's Hold over Shylock/ Lines 342–359	
Antonio's "Mercy" for Shylock/Lines 376–386	

Student Name ______________________________ Date __________

ACTIVITY 18

Seeing Both Sides

Act four, Scene 1

Background In this scene, Shylock goes from haughtily anticipating Antonio's death to being forced to convert to Christianity, forfeit half of his fortune, and will all of his possessions to the daughter who betrayed him. Is this completely just, or is there any reason to feel pity for Shylock?

Directions Think about everything you know of Shylock up until this point, and find lines and/or events that point to why his punishment is deserved and just and why his punishment may be unjust and/or too harsh. At the very least, give three reasons for each position.

Reasons Why What Happened to Shylock Is Just	Reasons Why What Happened to Shylock Is Unjust or Too Harsh
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
6.	6.

Student Name ______________________________ Date __________



ACTIVITY 19

Explaining to Portia

Act four, Scene 1

Background After Portia, disguised as a lawyer, saves the day by freeing Antonio from his debt and making Shylock forfeit half of his fortune, Bassanio offers her (disguised as a man) a tribute. She says she will take only his gloves and the ring that she (as Portia) had made him promise never to remove. At first, he refuses, but reluctantly complies after Antonio pleads with him to do so. One can easily imagine how Bassanio, only recently engaged to Portia, will be anxious to prove to her that he did not give the ring away carelessly and certainly not to another woman.

Directions Imagine that you are Bassanio rehearsing what you will say to Portia. Since you do not know that your wife was there, you will need to explain the events of the trial, speak extremely highly of the learned doctor of law who saved your best friend Antonio, and why you were compelled to give away such a sacred thing as the ring she gave to you. Use another sheet of paper, if necessary. Suggested length: 1–1½ pages.

Student Name ______________________________ Date ____________



ACTIVITY 20
Review

Directions Match the following characters with their actions. Write the letter of the correct character in the space provided. All letters will be used at least once.

a. Bassanio
b. Antonio
c. Shylock
d. Jessica
e. Portia
f. Nerissa
g. Lancelot

_____ 1. tells Jessica that she is going to hell

_____ 2. accompanies Portia to Venice

_____ 3. steals money and jewels from her father

_____ 4. demands justice and won't be persuaded to be merciful

_____ 5. offers Shylock six thousand ducats to free Antonio from his debt

_____ 6. urges Bassanio to give the lawyer Portia's ring

_____ 7. is forced to give up half his fortune

_____ 8. dresses as a man and pretends to be a lawyer

_____ 9. stipulates that Shylock must become a Christian

_____ 10. advises her new fiancé to leave her in order to save his friend

Student Name ______________________________ Date __________



ACTIVITY 21

Lorenzo and Jessica Wax Poetic

Act five, Scene 1

Background In this scene, Jessica and Lorenzo are speaking playfully to each other, waxing poetic about the beautiful night. Later, in lines 53–64, Lorenzo elaborates further, as he rhapsodizes about the music that emanates from heaven.

Directions Using Shakespearean language to the best of your ability by utilizing language from the play, choose one of the following to complete:

1. Continue the "In such a night" exchange that occurs at the beginning of the scene between Jessica and Lorenzo, speaking about what could happen on such a beautiful night. Suggested length: At least four more exchanges between the two lovers.

2. Attempt to describe the most beautiful night scene you have ever witnessed by describing it in Shakespearean language. Use another sheet of paper, if necessary. Suggested Length: 1/2 page.

Student Name ______________________________ Date ____________

ACTIVITY 22

"So shines a good deed in a naughty world."

Act five, Scene 1, and All Acts

Background As Portia and Nerissa return from Venice, Portia sees a small candle glowing from far away and comments, "So shines a good deed in a naughty world." (line 90)

Directions This line can be seen as a commentary of the play, as many of the characters have done good and selfless deeds in the midst of trouble and turmoil. Name the good deed(s) (there may be more than one per character) the following characters have performed in the play and the obstacles or selfish concerns that would have made it easier for them not to act selflessly. Use a separate sheet of paper, if necessary.

Antonio:

Bassanio:

Portia:

Duke:

Student Name ______________________________ Date ____________



ACTIVITY 23

Getting the Whole Story

Act five, Scene 1

Background Bassanio and Antonio are astonished when Portia reveals that she was the lawyer who saved Antonio's life in court and that Nerissa played her assistant. The men are equally surprised when Antonio discovers that all three of the ships carrying his fortunes have landed safely, but they have yet to discover the whole story of how Portia decided on this course of action.

Directions In lines 294–298, Portia says that they should go inside, and there she and Nerissa will answer all of the other unanswered questions the men have about this incredible turn of events. Compose this scene, in the traditional style of a play, with each character speaking his/her turn, creating the questions you think the men would be most likely to ask, and crafting the answers that the women would supply about their time in Venice. Use another sheet of paper, if necessary. Suggested length: 1–2 pages.

Student Name ________________________________ Date ____________

ACTIVITY 24

Predictions

All Acts

Background Contemplate the characters of this play, and speculate on what will occur in their futures.

Directions Consider the following characters—what you know of them and the events that affect them—and write brief predictions for each. Will they go on to become wealthy and have children? Remain in the positions they hold at the end of the book? Become unhappy because of false or unrealistic expectations? Will Bassanio get into financial trouble again, or Shylock reconcile with his daughter? You decide. Use a separate sheet of paper, if necessary.

Antonio:

Portia and Bassanio:

Jessica and Lorenzo:

Nerissa and Gratiano:

Shylock:

Student Name ________________________________ Date ____________



ACTIVITY 25

Review

Act five

Directions Choose the letter of the correct word that completes each of the following lines from Act five. Write it in the space provided.

____ 1. "In such a ______ Medea gathered the enchanted herbs that did renew old Aeson." (Jessica, line 13)

a. place
b. day
c. night
d. world

____ 2. "My mistress . . . doth stray about by holy crosses, where she kneels and prays for happy ______ hours." (Stephano, lines 29–32)

a. long
b. passionate
c. holy
d. wedlock

____ 3. "How sweet the ______ sleeps upon this bank!" (Lorenzo, line 53)

a. moonlight
b. breeze
c. lady
d. flower

____ 4. "I am never ______ when I hear sweet music." (Jessica, line 68)

a. sad
b. merry
c. alone
d. still

____ 5. "So shines a ______ deed in a naughty world." (Portia, line 90)

a. heroic
b. happy
c. selfless
d. good

____ 6. "Why, I were best to ______ my left hand off, and swear I lost the ring defending it." (Bassanio, lines 176–177)

a. saw
b. shake
c. cut
d. break

____ 7. "By heaven, I will ne'er come in your ______ until I see the ring." (Portia, lines 188–189)

a. bed
b. life
c. wife
d. understanding

(continued)



ACTIVITY 25

Review (*continued*)

____ 8. "Sweet lady, you have given me life and living; for here I read for certain that my ______ are safely come to road." (Antonio, lines 285–287)

a. friends
b. ships
c. riches
d. children

____ 9. "Let us go in, and charge us there upon inter'gatories, and we will answer all things ______." (Portia, lines 296–298)

a. faithfully
b. honestly
c. evasively
d. thoughtfully

____ 10. "Well, while I live I'll ______ no other thing so sore as keeping safe Nerissa's ring." (Gratiano, lines 305–306)

a. guard
b. stake
c. fear
d. take

Student Name ______________________________ Date ____________



ACTIVITY 26

Jessica: Victim or Villain?

All Acts

Background Jessica is a minor character who ends up playing a rather large role in the downfall of her father, Shylock. She has run away with his money in order to marry a Christian. Is she a victim or a villain? You decide.

Directions Find 4 to 6 lines spoken about or by Jessica in order to prove either that she is a victim of her father's tyranny or a villain who has not only stolen from her father but also broken his heart. List line numbers, acts, and scenes, briefly paraphrase the lines you choose, then explain why each supports your position.

Student Name ______________________________ Date ____________

ACTIVITY 27

Headlining the Play

All Acts

Directions Decide which event is of most importance to each of the acts, then write a headline depicting those events for each of the five acts. Remember that headlines often employ alliteration (**B**rawny **B**adgers **B**ludgeon Eagles in Semifinals) and vivid action verbs, and are straightforward and attention-getting. Generally, articles (a, an, the) are left out of headlines.

Headline for Act one:

Headline for Act two:

Headline for Act three:

Headline for Act four:

Headline for Act five:

Student Name ______________________________ Date ____________

ACTIVITY 28

Titling the Play

All Acts

Background Many think that Shakespeare titled this play *The Merchant of Venice* after the character Shylock. Why not title it after him, since he plays such a central role, or after Portia, who bravely and wisely defends her new love's friend and saves his life?

Directions Choose three other characters and come up with a title for each that reflects that character's actions and/or lines in the play; then defend each as better than the original, explaining why your title should be the title of the play.

Character and Title 1 with Explanation:

Character and Title 2 with Explanation:

Character and Title 3 with Explanation:

Finally, speculate about the original title of this play. Why might Shakespeare have chosen it? Do you think it better than your creations? Explain. Use another sheet of paper, if necessary.

Student Name ____________________ Date __________

ACTIVITY 29

Symbolism

All Acts

Background Symbols are often used in literature to represent abstract concepts. For instance, snow is a recognized symbol of purity and innocence, and the color red is often used to symbolize death or passion.

Directions Think about the following things or images from the play and what they might represent, and then briefly explain your thinking in the "What It Might Represent" column.

Symbol	What It Might Represent
Caskets	
Portia's portrait (within casket of lead)	
Ring (Portia gives to Bassanio)	
Moon (mentioned often in Act five, Scene 1)	
Pound of Flesh	
Candle (mentioned in Act five, Scene 1, lines 88–90)	
Symbol of Your Own and Where It's Found in Play	

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ACTIVITY 30

Review: Sequence of Events

Background Place the following events (divided by act) into the order that they occur by numbering them from one to four (one happening first and four happening last).

Act one

_____ Antonio agrees to sign the bond with Shylock for three thousand ducats or a pound of flesh.

_____ Antonio claims his melancholy is not related to love or money.

_____ Portia rates all of her suitors to Nerissa.

_____ Bassanio asks Antonio for money to woo Portia.

Act two

_____ Lancelot asks to serve Bassanio.

_____ The Prince of Morocco chooses the wrong casket.

_____ Portia warns the Prince of Morocco of the consequences of choosing wrongly.

_____ Jessica leaves her father's house to run away with Lorenzo.

Act three

_____ Nerissa and Gratiano declare their intention to marry.

_____ Bassanio chooses the correct casket, winning Portia's hand in marriage.

_____ Bassanio receives the letter from Antonio telling him of his financial troubles.

_____ Tubal tells Shylock of Antonio's misfortune at sea.

Act four

_____ Bassanio is compelled to give his ring to Balthazar (really Portia).

_____ Shylock refuses Bassanio's offer of six thousand ducats to release Antonio from his debt.

_____ Antonio dictates that Shylock must become a Christian.

_____ Portia, dressed as a man, successfully argues for Antonio's freedom.

Act five

_____ Lorenzo and Jessica discuss the beauty of the night.

_____ Portia and Nerissa return home.

_____ Portia suggests they all go inside to fully answer all questions about their adventure in Venice.

_____ Portia gives an astonished Bassanio the ring that he gave away.

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The Merchant of Venice — Final Test

Directions: Read the following quotations from *The Merchant of Venice*, and, in the space provided, write the letter of the character who spoke the line. All letters will be used at least once.

a. Portia	d. Morocco	g. Nerissa
b. Bassanio	e. Jessica	h. Gratiano
c. Shylock	f. Antonio	

___ 1. "I hold the world but as the world, Gratiano—a stage, where every man must play a part, and mine a sad one."

___ 2. "Hath not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions?"

___ 3. "Portia, adieu! I have too grieved a heart to take a tedious leave: thus losers part."

___ 4. "Farewell—and if my fortune be not crost, I have a father, you a daughter, lost."

___ 5. "I pray you, good Bassanio, let me know it; and if it stand, as you yourself still do, within the eye of honour, be assured, my purse, my person, my extremest means, lie all unlocked to your occasions."

___ 6. "I'll see if I can get my husband's ring, which I did make him swear to keep forever."

___ 7. "Well, while I live I'll fear no other thing so sore as keeping safe Nerissa's ring."

___ 8. "Pardon this fault, and by my soul I swear, I never more will break an oath with thee."

___ 9. "I'll have my bond; I will not hear thee speak. I'll have my bond, and therefore speak no more."

___ 10. "I pray thee over-name them, and as thou namest them, I will describe them, and according to my description level at my affection."

(continued)

Directions: Choose the letter of the best answer. Write it in the space provided.

___ 11. Who is the last person to speak in the play?

a. Antonio
b. Portia
c. Shylock
d. Gratiano

___ 12. Where is Portia from?

a. Venice
b. Padua
c. Belmont
d. Verona

___ 13. All of the action takes place in what country?

a. Italy
b. England
c. France
d. Denmark

___ 14. Who pretends to be a torch-bearer?

a. Nerissa
b. Jessica
c. Portia
d. Lancelot

___ 15. Who brings the letter to Bassanio telling of Antonio's misfortunes?

a. Lancelot
b. Gratiano
c. Lorenzo
d. Salerio

___ 16. Where does the trial take place?

a. Athens
b. Venice
c. Belmont
d. Padua

___ 17. Which casket was the correct one to choose in order to marry Portia?

a. gold
b. lead
c. silver
d. marble

___ 18. Who is Old Gobbo?

a. a clerk
b. a cobbler
c. Antonio's father
d. Lancelot's father

___ 19. How much money does Shylock lend to Antonio for Bassanio?

a. one thousand ducats
b. two thousand ducats
c. three thousand ducats
d. four thousand ducats

___ 20. What was Portia's name when disguised as the young but learned lawyer?

a. Balthazar
b. Solanio
c. Solario
d. Tubal

Student Name ________________________________ Date ____________



CULMINATING ACTIVITY 1

The Venice Times

Directions In small groups, compile a newspaper detailing the events covered over the course of the play. Mimic the sections of a modern-day newspaper, with pages that cover news, features, editorials, and so forth. Depending on the size of your group, you may want to appoint someone editor and others writers. Your paper may be in modern-day language or in Shakespearean English. You must correctly represent the events of the play, and you may fabricate quotations from characters when appropriate. But the quotations must stay true to the characters that Shakespeare has created. Include big, bold headlines and pictures as finishing touches to your edition of *The Venice Times*. Use additional sheets of paper for your newspaper.

Student Name ______________________________ Date ____________



CULMINATING ACTIVITY 2

The Merchant of Venice *in Fifteen Minutes*

Directions Take only the most important events and lines in each of the five acts and write five three-minute skits. Use the same language, but work it together by use of a narrator (who may invent more dialogue) or actions. In small groups, act out the five skits so that you have created a fifteen-minute version of the play. Use additional sheets of paper for your play.

Student Name ______________________________ Date ____________



CULMINATING ACTIVITY 3

Research Report

Directions Do some research on the underlying principles of the Jewish and Christian faiths in order to get a basic understanding of their similarities and differences. Write a report detailing these similarities and differences and adding your final speculations on this question after your research is completed: Based on your basic understanding of these two religions, were the two representatives of these religions (Antonio as a Christian, and Shylock as a Jew) in the play good or bad representatives (according to what you have learned)? Use additional sheets of paper for your report.

Student Name ______________________________ Date ____________



CULMINATING ACTIVITY 4

Essay

Directions Choose one central theme from the play and persuade your readers that the theme you have chosen is the most important to the play. Use quotes, passages, and events from the play for support. Some thematic ideas are friendship, loyalty, love, revenge, mercy, and justice. Use additional sheets of paper for your essay. Suggested length: 4 to 6 pages.

Student Name ______________________ Date __________



CULMINATING ACTIVITY 5

Current Events and The Merchant of Venice

Directions Take one significant quotation from the text and form a parallel to a significant event that has occurred in the last five years. Represent today's event realistically or symbolically with a drawing or collage, and try to show what meaning the quotation and event have in common. Print the Shakespearean quotation in large, readable letters beneath the drawing. On the back, write an explanation of how the drawing and quotation are similar, in preparation for a possible presentation to the class. Use additional sheets of paper for this activity.

Activity 1

Answers will vary, but the following may serve as a guideline:

1. Antonio's treasure/investments and the possibility of its being lost at sea
2. Money
3. His money isn't tied up all in one place.
4. Fools who never stop laughing or fools who never crack a smile
5. Love/a woman
6. Know-it-alls who expect people to consider them wise simply because they are quiet
7. He wants to borrow some money so that he can court the wealthy Portia.
8. He is either really generous or allows himself to be taken advantage of.

Activity 2

Answers will vary.

Activity 3

Answers will vary, but the following may serve as a guideline:

1. Someone who is financially stable
2. Because they are Christians (and they eat food he considers unclean)
3. Because he is a Christian and lends out money for free (thereby reducing Shylock's business)
4. By gaining revenge any way he can
5. A pound of Antonio's flesh
6. By saying that it's not profitable to have a pound of his flesh anyway, so he wouldn't collect on the debt
7. Answers will vary.

Activity 4

Answers will vary.

Activity 5

1. F
2. F
3. F
4. F
5. F
6. F
7. T
8. F
9. F
10. F

Activity 6

Answers will vary.

Activity 7

Letters will vary.

Activity 8

Answers will vary, but the following may serve as a guideline:

Lead: He doesn't think he should have to risk all for lead, which is a base and lesser metal.

Silver: He thinks he deserves the best, and silver is not the best.

Gold: It's the best, he thinks he deserves the best, and his lady (or the picture of her), wouldn't lie in anything base like silver or lead, of far less worth than gold.

Activity 9

Answers will vary, but the following may serve as a guideline:

1. I'll engage with you in matters profitable to me, but no more. This shows that he is serious about his faith and considers it inappropriate to have friends outside of his faith.
2. If I can get him in a vulnerable situation, I will take advantage of him so that I can get revenge upon him. A curse upon Jews if I forgive him (since he's been hateful to Jews). This shows that Shylock holds grudges and is somewhat devious.
3. If the money isn't repaid when it should be, Shylock will take a pound of his flesh, which basically means Antonio would die. This shows that Shylock is eager to gain his revenge, even in a bloody way.
4. He can't decide which is more hateful to him—losing his daughter to a Christian or losing his money. This shows that he is overly concerned with money and somewhat greedy.

Activity 10

1. g
2. b
3. d
4. a
5. e
6. h
7. f
8. i
9. c
10. b

Activity 11

Answers will vary, but the following may serve as a guideline:

1. He has disgraced him.
2. He has hindered him.
3. Laughed at his misfortune
4. Mocked his successes
5. Scorned his nationality
6. Tried to prevent his deals
7. Alienated his friends
8. Made his enemies even angrier

Questions:

1. Because Shylock is Jewish
2. That he is a person, too, who hurts when treated badly
3. That they are more alike than they are different

Activity 12

Answers will vary.

Activity 13

Answers will vary.

Activity 14

Answer will vary, but the following may serve as a guideline:

1. Either that she is too picky and critical or that she simply has not yet met a man who truly excites and interests her
2. The man must be attractive.
3. That she falls in love quickly and is somewhat melodramatic
4. That she is understanding and truly cares about Bassanio
5. That she is clever and can make plans in a pinch

Activity 15

1. c
2. d
3. b
4. c
5. a
6. d
7. a
8. c
9. c
10. d

Activity 16

Answers will vary.

Activity 17

Answers will vary, but the following may serve as a guideline:

Lines	Summary with Brief Explanation
Mercy/Lines 181–202	Mercy is the most important of all attributes; without it, none of us would see heaven as we are all full of sin. By being merciful, you will be blessed.
Venetian Laws/ Lines 215–219	Nothing can overrule a bond/lawful decree, because it would create a bad precedent and then chaos would rule.
Bond and Blood/ Lines 302–309	According to this bond (by which we lawfully must abide), you may not take one drop of blood; only the flesh. If you shed any blood, all of your possessions will be seized by the state of Venice.
Details of the Flesh Debt/Lines 320–328	You may shed no blood and take no more or less than one pound of flesh exactly; if there is any more or less or any blood, your property will be taken and you may be put to death.
Law's Hold over Shylock/Lines 342–359	Since you have actively sought Antonio's life, the laws decree that Antonio is entitled to take one half of your possessions, and the other half goes to the state treasury. Your life is at the mercy of the Duke, and you may be facing the death penalty. All this because you have plotted Antonio's death.
Antonio's "Mercy" for Shylock/Lines 376–386	I (Antonio) forfeit my right to seize the half of the fortune that would pay the fine as long as I can get the other half, which will be in trust during Shylock's lifetime. After his death, Jessica and Lorenzo will get it. Also, Shylock must immediately convert to Christianity and leave all his worldly possessions to Jessica and Lorenzo when he dies.

Activity 18

Answers will vary.

Activity 19

Answers will vary.

Activity 20

1. g
2. f
3. d
4. c
5. a
6. b
7. c
8. e
9. b
10. e

Activity 21

Answers will vary.

Activity 22

Answers will vary, but the following may serve as a guideline:

Antonio: He borrowed money from Shylock, who hates him, with Antonio's death being the payment should he not be able to pay. It would have been easier to just say he couldn't give the money to Bassanio because his fortunes were tied up at sea.

Bassanio: He left his new fiancée to go and save his friend instead of selfishly staying with his new love.

Portia: She dressed as a man, went to Venice, and argued Antonio's case even though she had never met him before. Also, she gave six thousand ducats to Bassanio and encouraged him to rescue Antonio immediately after they had declared their love for one another.

Duke: The Duke spares Shylock's life even though Shylock showed no mercy when given the chance.

Activity 23

Answers will vary.

Activity 24

Answers will vary.

Activity 25

1. c
2. d
3. a
4. b
5. d
6. c
7. a
8. b
9. a
10. c

Activity 26

Answers will vary.

Activity 27

Answers will vary.

Activity 28

Answers will vary.

Activity 29

Answers will vary.

Activity 30

Act one: 4, 1, 3, 2

Act two: 2, 4, 1, 3

Act three: 3, 2, 4, 1

Act four: 4, 1, 3, 2

Act five: 1, 2, 4, 3

Final Test

1. f
2. c
3. d
4. e
5. f
6. g
7. h
8. b
9. c
10. a
11. d
12. c
13. a
14. b
15. d
16. b
17. b
18. d
19. c
20. a

Culminating Activity 1

Newspapers will vary, but the following may serve as a grading guideline:

- All events, quotations, and stories accurately represent what occurred in the play.
- Newspaper is visually appealing with creative headlines and well-done pictures.
- Several different sections are attempted.
- Stories are well written with accurate grammar and punctuation.

Culminating Activity 2

Skits will vary, but the following may serve as a grading guideline:

- Students were not overly tied to scripts (practiced enough)
- Demonstrated understanding of play; did not misinterpret lines or events
- Participation by everyone in group
- Within time guideline
- Energetic and enthusiastic performance; spoke loud enough for everyone to hear

Culminating Activity 3

Reports will vary, but the following may serve as a grading guideline:

- Obvious that the student did not plagiarize sources, and put the material in his/her own words
- A basic representation of the similarities and differences between the two religions is present
- Students attempted to thoughtfully answer the guiding question (whether Shylock and Antonio were good or bad representatives of their respective religions)
- Any events or quotations from the book are used accurately

Culminating Activity 4

Essays will vary, but the following may serve as a grading guideline:

- Strong thesis that remains the focus for entire paper
- Textual support
- Within length guidelines
- Properly attributes quotations from play
- Demonstrates understanding of text
- Well-supported thesis
- Proper spelling and punctuation

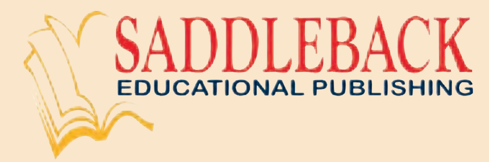
Culminating Activity 5

Drawings will vary, but the following may serve as a grading guideline:

- Event from text is correctly interpreted
- Pictures, illustrations, and words are clearly visible
- Parallel to modern-day event makes sense and shows insight into text

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